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Review of issues pertinent to the subsidiary structure of the Commission, including the work of the regional institutions: subregional activities for development

Report of the Governing Council of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia on its eighth session**

Summary

At its eighth session, the Governing Council of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) noted with satisfaction the outcomes of the SPECA Economic Forum entitled "Inclusive and sustainable development through regional cooperation", which was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, from 19 to 21 November 2013. It acknowledged the importance of strengthened regional cooperation for the full implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and expressed support for the inclusion of development priorities of SPECA countries into the development agenda beyond 2015. The Governing Council approved the Joint Statement of the 2013 SPECA Economic Forum.

The Council approved the progress reports of the SPECA project working groups and noted with appreciation the work carried out by them since its last session. It expressed satisfaction with the broad scope of activities undertaken by SPECA and the stability of extrabudgetary funding received by SPECA projects. The Council adopted the SPECA Work Plan for 2014-2015 and called upon relevant United Nations agencies and programmes, as well as the donor community to actively participate in the implementation and financing of projects contained in the work plan.

The Council noted with satisfaction the report on the work of the Joint ESCAP/ECE SPECA Office. It encouraged further strengthening the role of the Office in project implementation within the SPECA framework.

The Council noted with satisfaction the report on cooperation between SPECA and regional organizations and institutions and supported further strengthening coordination and cooperation with partner organizations and donors in strategic areas of regional cooperation.

The Governing Council expressed its gratitude for the report on the consultations of the executive secretaries of ESCAP and ECE with the Governments of SPECA countries on the proposals on further strengthening SPECA. It approved the proposals and called upon the two regional commissions to actively support their implementation by SPECA countries.

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** The late submission of the present document is due to the need to hold several rounds of informal consultations with ECE and the Chair of SPECA before finalizing the report.

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I. Decisions

Decision 1 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2013/1)

The Governing Council notes with satisfaction the outcomes of the SPECA Economic Forum entitled "Inclusive and sustainable development through regional cooperation", held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, from 19 to 21 November 2013. It acknowledges the importance of strengthened regional cooperation for the full implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.[1] It supports the inclusion of development priorities of SPECA countries into the development agenda beyond 2015. The Council approves the Joint Statement of the 2013 SPECA Economic Forum.

Decision 2 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2013/2)

The Governing Council approves the progress reports of the SPECA project working groups and notes with appreciation the work carried out by working groups since its last session. It expresses satisfaction with the broad scope of

[1] General Assembly resolution 66/288, annex..

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activities undertaken by SPECA and the stability of extrabudgetary funding received by SPECA projects.

Decision 3 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2013/3)

The Governing Council adopts the SPECA Work Plan for 2014-2015 as presented by the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). It calls upon relevant United Nations agencies and programmes and the donor community to actively participate in the implementation and financing of projects contained in the work plan.

Decision 4 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2013/4)

The Governing Council approves the Terms of Reference of the Project Working Group on Trade. It expresses the hope that the terms of reference will contribute to the continued effective management and highly professional activities of the project working group.

Decision 5 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2013/5)

The Governing Council expresses its gratitude for the report on the consultations of the executive secretaries of ECE and ESCAP with Governments of SPECA countries on the proposals on further strengthening SPECA. It approves the proposals and calls upon the two regional commissions to actively support their implementation by SPECA countries.

Decision 6 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2013/6)

The Governing Council approves the Terms of Reference of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia. It expresses its conviction that the terms of reference will provide a solid basis for the effective governance and implementation of the Programme.

Decision 7 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2013/7)

The Governing Council notes with satisfaction the report on the work of the Joint ESCAP/ECE SPECA Office and encourages further strengthening the role of the Office in project implementation within the SPECA framework.

Decision 8 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2013/8)

The Governing Council notes with satisfaction the report on cooperation between SPECA and regional organizations and institutions. It supports the further strengthening of coordination and cooperation with partner organizations and donors in strategic areas of regional cooperation.

Decision 9 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2013/9)

The Governing Council expresses its sincere gratitude to the Government of Kazakhstan for the country's active work as the Chair country of SPECA during the period 2012-2013.

Decision 10 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2013/10)

The Governing Council welcomes the offer by the Government of Afghanistan to assume the Chairmanship of SPECA starting 23 November 2013. It elects Afghanistan as the Chair country of SPECA for the period 2013-2014.

Decision 11 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2013/11)

The Governing Council takes note with appreciation the offer by the Government of Turkmenistan to assist the Government of Afghanistan in carrying out its duties as the Chair country of SPECA.

Decision 12 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2013/12)

The date and venue of the 2014 SPECA Economic Forum and the ninth session of the Governing Council will be decided by consultations through diplomatic channels.

Decision 13 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2013/13)

The Governing Council expresses its sincere gratitude to the Government of Kazakhstan for the excellent organization and hospitality extended to the participants of the 2013 SPECA Economic Forum and the eighth session of the Governing Council of SPECA.

Decision 14 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2013/14)

The Governing Council expresses its deep appreciation to the secretariats of ECE and ESCAP and their respective executive secretaries for their efforts in organizing these important annual events and also expresses its special appreciation for their active work aimed at strengthening SPECA and for their continued support to programme implementation. The Governing Council also expresses its best wishes to the Executive Secretary of ESCAP in her transfer to another job.

II. Introduction

1. The eighth session of the Governing Council of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 22 November 2013.

III. Participants

2. Representatives of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, as well as the Executive Secretary of ECE, the Deputy Executive Secretary of ECE, the Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCAP and the Head of the ESCAP Subregional Office for North and Central Asia and the Joint ESCAP/ECE SPECA Office participated in the session. Representatives of other United Nations Member States, the European Union, United Nations agencies, international and regional organizations, as well as members of the academic community and the private sector also attended the session as observers.

IV. Opening of the session

3. Mr. Timur Zhaksylykov, Deputy Minister for Economy and Budget Planning of the Republic of Kazakhstan, served as Chair of the session.

4. In his opening address, the Chair emphasized the importance of the current session, which was planning to discuss the proposals on further strengthening SPECA. Those proposals had the potential to improve governance of the Programme, to streamline its working methods and to increase its effectiveness.

5. The Executive Secretary of ECE, in his opening statement, underlined that project implementation in the SPECA framework had increased several fold since the 2005 reform was introduced, but that increase in activities could not keep pace with the increase in demand. At recent Governing Council sessions, Governments of SPECA participating countries had continued to urge the two regional commissions to provide more resources for project implementation. Since ECE and ESCAP themselves were not donors, extrabudgetary resources needed to be raised through a joint effort of participating countries and the two regional commissions. A set of proposals on further strengthening SPECA was presented to the Governing Council at its seventh session, which was held in Bangkok on 28 November 2012. He explained that since then, he had paid visits to several SPECA countries, including Kazakhstan, which he went to with the Executive Secretary of ESCAP, to discuss those proposals. Overall, the reactions of top-level decision makers of those countries were positive and supportive, reconfirming the importance of the Programme.

6. The Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCAP emphasized that strengthening SPECA remained one of the most important items on the agenda. The approval of proposals aimed at strengthening SPECA by the Governing Council at its eighth session would increase the Programme's relevance, leverage its governance and ownership by participating countries and better align it with the goals of inclusive, resilient and sustainable development. He also highlighted a four-point agenda for strengthening SPECA, namely: (a) the Terms of Reference of SPECA, which would define more clearly the constitution and mandate of the Programme's different structures — the Governing Council, the Economic Forum and the project working groups — and clarify the rules pertaining to decision-making, procedures for the adoption of work plans and issuing project working group progress reports, and the election and mandate of the Chair country, as well as the role of national coordinators; (b) strengthening the Programme's work by enhancing its ownership, as up to now it had remained primarily United Nations-driven; (c) building shared interests in areas that it should play a more active role in formulating common interests, agendas and programmes of action in order to strengthen cooperation and integration among the participating countries, as well as within and between subregions; and (d) closer cooperation between SPECA and other partners, including United Nations agencies other international organizations and multilateral development institutions. He also underlined the important role SPECA could play in improving coordination of Central Asian subregional initiatives for implementation of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development outcomes and helping member States in the formulation of the development agenda beyond 2015.

7. In their opening statements, the representatives of participating countries expressed support for the efforts of the two regional commissions to further strengthen SPECA and to involve the Programme in regional-level implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and in the preparation of the development agenda beyond 2015.

V. Adoption of the Agenda

8. The Governing Council adopted the following agenda:

1. Opening of the session;
2. Adoption of the agenda;

3. Outcomes of the 2013 SPECA Economic Forum "Inclusive and sustainable development through regional cooperation";

4. SPECA activities since the last session of the Governing Council;

5. Adoption of the SPECA Work Plan for 2014-2015;

6. Approval of the Terms of Reference of the Project Working Group on Trade;

7. Briefing on consultations of the Executive Secretaries of ECE and ESCAP in the capital of SPECA countries on the "Proposal on further strengthening SPECA", presented to the 7th session of the Governing Council;

8. Report of the work of the Joint ESCAP/ECE SPECA Office since the last session of the Governing Council;

9. Cooperation between SPECA and regional organizations and institutions;

10. Election of the next Chair (country) of SPECA;

11. Other business, including date and venue of the 2014 SPECA Economic Forum and 9th session of the SPECA Governing Council;

12. Adoption of conclusions and decisions;

13. Closing of the session.

VI. Outcomes of the 2013 SPECA Economic Forum "Inclusive and sustainable development through regional cooperation"

9. The Chair introduced the Joint Statement of the 2013 SPECA Economic Forum. Representatives of the SPECA countries noted with satisfaction the outcomes of the Economic Forum and acknowledged the importance of strengthening regional cooperation for full implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

VII. SPECA activities since the last session of the Governing Council

10. The Deputy SPECA Coordinator at ECE informed participants on the activities of the SPECA project working groups since the last session of the Governing Council. While emphasizing the impressive results and stability of project implementation in the SPECA framework, he pointed out that a further increase in the number of projects and resources for project implementation would require additional efforts by the Governments of participating countries and the two regional commissions to raise more extrabudgetary resources.

VIII. Adoption of the SPECA Work Plan for 2014-2015

11. The Deputy Head of the Joint ESCAP/ECE SPECA Office introduced the draft work plan for 2014-2015.

12. During the discussions, one representative raised objections to projects implemented within the SPECA framework that did not cover all seven of the SPECA participating countries. He proposed that in the future, each SPECA project should cover all participating countries. The majority of delegates of the SPECA countries supported continuation of the existing practice of

including in the work plan projects that cover only part of the SPECA region, namely projects involving fewer than all seven participating countries. It was pointed out that certain challenges, such as the environmental catastrophe resulting from the shrinkage of the Aral Sea, did not directly affect all seven SPECA countries. Thus, there was no reason not to include projects addressing such challenges in the work plan as they addressed the needs of several participating countries and their solution required regional cooperation.

13. There were no objectives by the members of the Governing Council to the adoption of the SPECA Work Plan for 2014-2015.

IX. Approval of the Terms of Reference of the Project Working Group on Trade

14. The Director of the ECE Economic Cooperation, Trade and Land Management Division introduced the draft terms of reference of the Project Working Group on Trade.

15. There were no objections by members of the Governing Council to the adoption of the Terms of Reference of the Project Working Group on Trade.

X. Briefing on consultations of the Executive Secretaries of ECE and ESCAP in the capitals of SPECA countries on the "Proposals on further strengthening SPECA"

16. The Executive Secretary of ECE reported on the consultations with the Government of Kazakhstan, held jointly with the Executive Secretary of ESCAP in Kazakhstan, and his official visits to Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan to discuss the proposals on further strengthening SPECA. In Bishkek, he met with Prime Minister Jantoro Satybaldyev. In Dushanbe, he was received by President Emomali Rahmon and in Ashgabat by President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov. He also met and conducted more detailed discussions with the ministers of foreign affairs of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

17. During those consultations, the high-level leaders and decision makers underlined the importance of SPECA and its role in strengthening regional cooperation. They supported the main direction of the proposals, namely more active participation by the Governments of SPECA countries in managing the Programme, which should be more responsive to the needs of the participating countries and include more projects to be implemented in the areas of regional cooperation that could have the greatest impact.

18. After concluding the first round of visits, the Executive Secretary underlined that the proposals on further strengthening SPECA were in line with the needs and suggestions expressed by his counterparts during those consultations. He was of the view that that their adoption and implementation could significantly enhance the effectiveness of the Programme.

19. He summarized the main areas of SPECA that would be strengthened by the proposals, as follows:

(a) The adoption of the Terms of Reference of SPECA would clearly define the composition and mandate of various bodies under the Programme, including rules of decision-making and the role of SPECA national coordinators. Thus, 15 years after its creation, SPECA would be able to operate on the basis of agreed and clearly defined rules;

(b) By encouraging participating countries to provide both financial and in-kind support, such as conference facilities and interpretation to SPECA activities, the proposals would strengthen those countries' ownership of the Programme;

(c) The more active role of SPECA countries in project development and implementation would guarantee that projects implemented in the SPECA framework properly reflected the needs and demands of participating countries. It would also facilitate fundraising by convincing donors that SPECA projects were truly demand-driven.

20. Recent consultations in capital cities of SPECA member countries had convincingly demonstrated the importance of regular high-level contacts between the Governments of the SPECA participating countries and the senior management of the two regional commissions tasked with supporting the Programme, as well as with other United Nations agencies. Such consultations, on the one hand, provided authoritative guidance to the regional commissions on the needs of SPECA countries and, on the other hand, offered an opportunity to further bolster the political will for strengthening regional cooperation.

21. The Governing Council adopted the proposals on further strengthening SPECA and the Terms of Reference of SPECA

XI. Report on the work of the Joint ESCAP/ECE SPECA Office since the last session of the Governing Council

22. The Head of the ESCAP Subregional Office for North and Central Asia and the Joint ESCAP/ECE SPECA Office reported on the activities of the Office since the seventh session of the Governing Council, which was held in Bangkok on 28 November 2012.

23. He stated that the Office had led the preparation of the 2012 SPECA Economic Forum, which was held in Bangkok on 27 and 28 November, and the seventh session of the Governing Council of SPECA and had provided active support to events organized by SPECA in 2013. In addition, throughout 2013, the Office had extended support to meetings of the SPECA project working groups on transport and border crossing, trade, water and energy resources and knowledge-based development.

24. Apart from SPECA, the Office's main activities in 2013 focused on strengthening inclusive and sustainable development, building resilience with regard to the environment, technology and climate change, water management and energy sources, and connectivity in the areas of trade, transport and information and communications technology. Among the activities were the following: a high-level panel at the VI Astana Economic Forum, Astana, 22-24 May; Youth Forum on the Implementation of Rio+20, Vladivostok, Russian Federation, 18-21 August; the High-level Policy Dialogue "Macroeconomic Policies for Sustainable and Resilient Growth in North and Central Asia", Almaty, Kazakhstan, 27-28 August; national consultations in Kazakhstan on the development agenda beyond 2015; the Asian and Pacific Energy Forum, Vladivostok, Russian Federation, 27-30 May; subregional seminars on energy and water in North and Central Asia; and the Final Regional Review of the Almaty Programme of Action for the Landlocked Developing countries, Vientiane, 5-7 March.

25. He also informed the delegates about some of Office's project activities, including the project entitled "Strengthening cooperation for Disaster Risk Reduction in North and Central Asia", which was implemented in 2013,

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the ongoing project entitled "Strengthening Economic Ties between Afghanistan and Central Asia" and a new project on safety assessment of small dams in Central Asia.

XII. Cooperation between SPECA and regional organizations and institutions

26. The Executive Secretary of ECE delivered a report on cooperation between SPECA and other regional organizations since the seventh session of the Governing Council.

27. He underlined that adoption of the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, "The future we want" provided strong momentum to ongoing cooperation among ECE, ESCAP and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The latter was playing an important role in the implementation of the outcomes. At the same time, in the outcome document, important tasks had been assigned to the regional commissions, in particular in efforts to invigorate regional cooperation. ECE and UNEP were jointly supporting efforts to strengthen the Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development, which was tasked with playing a central role in the implementation of outcomes at the regional level. In the light of the outcome of discussions during the high-level segment of the 2013 SPECA Economic Forum on regional aspects of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and the development agenda beyond 2015, cooperation among ECE, ESCAP and UNEP was expected to remain intensive and close.

28. SPECA, through its various project working groups, worked closely with a large number of partners and donors, including the Czech Republic, the Department for International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Finland, Germany, Israel, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), as well as with the Asian Development Bank, the Eurasian Development Bank, the Eurasian Economic Commission, the European Union, the Global Environment Facility, the International Trade Centre, the International Labour Organization, the Islamic Development Bank, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization.

29. ECE continued to work closely with the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS), one of the most important Central Asian regional organizations. Following the rotation of the Chairmanship from Kazakhstan to Uzbekistan, a new work programme was being discussed and agreed upon. It focused on supporting implementation of the Third Aral Sea Basin Programme through intensive donor coordination, further institutional and legal strengthening of IFAS, capacity-building on international water law and dam safety. Work with the Regional Environmental Center for Central Asia was likely to receive new momentum with the possible continuation of work on water quality.

XIII. Election of the next Chair (country) of SPECA

30. The Governing Council elected Afghanistan as the Chair country of SPECA for the period 2013-2014.

XIV. Other business, including the date and venue of the 2014 SPECA Economic Forum and the 9th session of the SPECA Governing Council

31. Participants took note of the statement by the representative of Afghanistan that the date and venue of the 2014 SPECA Economic Forum and the ninth session of the SPECA Governing Council would be communicated to the Governments of participating countries through diplomatic channels.

XV. Adoption of conclusions and decisions

32. The Governing Council adopted 14 decisions. In accordance with the established practice, the decisions would enter into force, if no objection is received, within 30 days.

XVI. Closing of the session

33. The Chair closed the eighth session of the Governing Council of SPECA.

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